

Top cop says new post challenging

By Tom Gavey *Intel Sept 22/99 p. 8*
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You could call the McElary-Downers a family of top cops.

Recently, Belleville native Robin McElary-Downer was named this year's top female police officer by an international police organization.

And, last year her husband David Downer was honoured as top cop in Peel Region.

McElary-Downer, 39, will receive the Officer of the Year award from the International Women's Police Association's at their annual conference Oct. 12-15 in Philadelphia, Pa.

She says she can remember wanting to be a police officer when she was five-years-old growing up in Belleville.

"I remember seeing my dad doing things for people and I decided that was what I wanted to do with my life," says McElary-Downer.

She's the daughter of retired Sgt. Laurie McElary of Quinte OPP and his wife Beverly.

McElary-Downer is now an inspector and manager of the OPP's Ontario First Nations policing program, working out of general headquarters in Orillia.



Robin McElary-Downer

She graduated from Centennial Secondary School in 1978 and then took the two-year Law and Security program at Loyalist College. McElary-Downer joined the OPP in March of 1981 with her first posting in Pembroke. She went from there to Port Credit and then into surveillance and later anti-rackets.

In 1992 she was posted back to Port Credit as the OPP's first detachment commander.

McElary has worked through the ranks, from constable to sergeant to staff-sergeant to inspector.

In 1998 she was named manager of the service's First Nations policing program.

"It's very, very challenging. As a detachment commander things were black and white in the field. Now, there aren't right and wrong decisions but you try to make the best choices," says McElary-Downer.

She heads up a program that polices 33 First Nations communities in Ontario with 84 Native officers.

"It's challenging to keep the lines of communications open, especially in the northern communities that are fly in. We try to keep the officers up to date on equipment, training and other issues," says McElary-Downer.

She was nominated for the award by a member of her program but says the nomination was a shock to her.

McElary-Downer will attend the conference in October to receive her award.

Her husband David is a staff sergeant with Peel Region Police and the couple has a 10-year-old son and an eight-year-old daughter.